

'Wha's like us' collaboration with CSSS Secondary & INTER-ACT (1999)

Coordinated by Tom Houston (INTER-ACT)

<http://nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/health-promotion/inter-act/>

In collaboration with,

David Tiploff (freelance): Musical Director/Drama

Andrew Paterson (freelance): Visual Director

Staff & pupil members of Clackmannanshire Schools Support Services (CSSS Secondary), Alloa, Clackmannanshire, Scotland.

<http://clacks-sss.com/csss-secondary/>

Commissioned by Rosa MacPherson, then Clackmannanshire Arts Development Officer

Post-event report on the Digital / Analogue Art Workshops, 3rd June, 1999.

Who: Interested pupils of CSSS Secondary unity, age 11-16.

Where: Located within computer room of school, CSSS Secondary unity, Alloa.

When: 11th- 27th May 1999.

Combined arts performance - 27th May 1999, 7pm.

Basic outline of project:

Under the fictional premise of a future PR corporation (hereafter *SNITT+Co2007*), set 8 years into the future, the performance event was billed as 'an evening meal to celebrate Scotland's health, history and hopes'. This fictional PR company had arranged the occasion to democratically elect a new symbolic 'coat of arms' or assembly for the increasingly dissatisfying Scottish Parliament.

Through the use of time-travelling projection technology, the PR corporation would call up scenarios from different periods in Scottish history (1707, 1745, 1840, 1910, 1999) to highlight a positive, negative and neutral symbol to put forward for vote among the evening's participants to be included in the symbolic 'coat of arms'.

Interlaced within the serving of an evening meal, each time period was introduced by a one minute video projection, leading into the drama sequences (inspired by stories from Alloa's history).

Logistics of workshops:

As the aim of the project was to include as many of the pupils as possible, the workshops were broken down into 3 groups:

Performers (drama)

Makers (stage design / props / artwork)

Technocrats (computer graphics + identity / animation / video / documentary)

As visual director of the project I was coordinator of the 'technocrats', while maintaining contact with the 'makers', and assisting with the stage design in mind of video projection.

On the first day the pupil numbers were split into three, and each group was offered a half hour introduction to what being part of the 'performers', 'makers' and 'technocrats' would involve. For the technocrats this involved an quick introduction to the possibilities of image manipulation, and noting that being a 'technocrat' could offer other roles than working on computers, for example use of camcorders, digital camera, and the important role of documenting the whole workshop process and performance.

Following the choice made by the pupils, I had a group of approximately eight at best, although this fluctuated as some pupils only attended the unit several days a week. Also due to the sensitive concentration levels and behaviour of the teenagers, the number of the group was dependent upon good behaviour and on occasions had to accommodate members from the either the 'makers' or the 'performers'.

On the whole, however, I did not experience the problems with behaviour witnessed in the other groups, and had a settled group. I considered myself fortunate, but appreciated that I had a few things in my favour - the school having very good computer facilities meant that a good number of the guys played state-of-the-art computer games during breaks, and so using the computers was an effective means to regulate behaviour. Also I appreciated that coming from the same geographical area, and even the same small town as a few of the guys, meant that I had an advantage in gaining respect quickly.

Responsible for the production of 5 x 1 minute video/animation sequences utilizing still and moving images gathered by the members of the 'techno' group, the documentation of the

workshops, as well as the creation of the visual identity for the fictional PR corporation *SNITT+Co2007*, it was important that each member of the group was familiarized with the all the image capturing equipment - 2 SVHS camcorders and a digital camera.

Also it had to be established who would have the roles of the documentary team (director and cameraman), as they would spend half-an-hour each session recording footage from all 3 workshop groups.

With the initial idea that a portion of the images gathered would come from sources outside the school, it was necessary to split the remaining numbers so that two people, with the accompaniment of a member of staff, were so-called 'image hunter-gatherers', using one of the SVHS cameras and the digital-still camera. These two people contributed immensely to the process, bringing back images from site locations, library books, and the procuring of props for staged footage.

The remaining members of the group were based with myself in the proclaimed digital 'HQ' that was the computer room of the school. Concepts of graphic identity were explored briefly, including use of fonts etc., and images were gathered using the Internet, scanned from books or leaflets, or generated using 3D imaging software. When necessary basic animations were constructed, either hand-drawn, or constructed using layers in image manipulation software such as Photoshop.

Each day during the second week the group gathered images and footage related to a different time period within the human life-cycle - birth, childhood, teenage aspirations, adulthood, and death - drawing the images from present day reference, with note to the relevant drama scenario of the production set in the past (1707, 1745, and so on).

Due to the short contact time with the pupils, (two and half hours per day) and the complexity of each theme, the session started with a quick introduction to the day's theme and a verbal exploration of what each topic meant to them. It was then discussed how each member would find or 'gather' a relevant image, and the remaining session time was devoted to stock-piling video footage, digital photographs, Internet information, and the creation of animation sequences, to be processed later towards digital video composition.

Unfortunately because of the particular problems of concentration among these particular groups of teenagers, beyond the 2 hours, it was not possible to teach developed-use of the software, or process the images and data for composition. However I was satisfied that although the majority of the post-gathering work was completed by myself, each participant could clearly identify with, and claim-as-their-own, the end product. I would like to see the end product of the workshops - the graphic identity of *SNITT+Co2007* and the resultant 5 one-minute animation sequences - as the result of a collaborative relationship between myself and the teenagers involved.

Appendix: Example of development and interpretation of daily theme

Adulthood> Positive choice / outward looking / stand up for what you believe in /
Belief that your contribution can help change the status-quo

RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (Urban / Natural)

Pollution (air/toxic/noise); Vandalism; Litter

Image source> Ochil glens (info boards); Gartmorn Dam conservation reserve
Blank wall in town (to draw/layer artistic graffiti with photoshop)

COMBAT AND ERADICATE FEAR

Crime prevention; Anti-violence; Anti-nazi

Image source> Police leaflets; Internet

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES

Solar/Hydro/Wind/Geo-thermal power

Image source> Clip Art files, Library

DRUG AWARENESS

Harm reduction; Awareness / informed decision-making

Image source> Advice centre leaflets

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Race / Ethnic / Gender / Children / Disabled / Sexual preference

Image source> Library; Video (Martin Luther King); Council documentation
Internet